

Education Cabinet

Creeping, crawling, flying bugs take over local public libraries during the 2008 Catch the Reading Bug summer reading program

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FRANKFORT, Ky. – Catching a bug this summer could help Kentucky students retain valuable educational gains made during the school year. The bug isn't a germ, it's the 2008 Catch the Reading Bug theme for the public library summer reading program sponsored by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (KDLA).

While children are being encouraged to Catch the Reading Bug at their local public libraries, teens are engaging in the bug theme Metamorphosis @ Your Library. Kentucky is one of 46 states that belong to the National Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP), the consortium promoting the program.

Carol Baughman, children's and youth services consultant for KDLA, said it is important for children and teens to keep reading during the summer. Research has shown that children who do not read during the summer can lose as much as 2.5 months of learning over the school break.

"There's significant evidence that if children read throughout the summer they can maintain their reading levels from one grade to the next grade. This is a fun way to keep students interested in reading and learning," Baughman said.

Last year, more than 149,000 children and teens in 106 counties swarmed like bees to Kentucky's public libraries to join in the summer reading fun. In the last 10 years, the number of Kentucky participants has grown from more than 63,500 who took the reading challenge in 1997 to more than 149,000 who joined last year. Baughman said that the fastest growing segments of the summer reading program are early childhood and teens.

This year the program is off to a cocoon-splitting start as public libraries feature bug-related books, poetry, games, and science and art activities. Some Kentucky libraries have even adopted Madagascar hissing cockroaches as mascots to further the theme. A University of Kentucky entomologist helped libraries get the cockroaches which are not harmful to humans and are kept as pets instead of pests in the United States. Madagascar hissing cockroaches do not breed with American cockroaches.

“Librarians, children and teens are fired up about it. There’s a gigantic ick factor that kids love. The teens love the metamorphous poster,” said Baughman.

Clark County Public Library Director Julie Maruskin said since they started the summer reading program on May 31 more than 800 children have signed up. She said their goal is to have more than 1,000 participants and they are quickly reaching that mark. The children and youth librarians have made a special habitat for their Madagascar hissing cockroaches Eli and Peyton.

Maruskin said that children have responded well to Eli and Peyton. “The children love them. They think they’re wonderful. They are very interesting,” she said.

Clark County teens are interested in insects as pets so the cockroaches have caught their interest. “It surprises me because you would think there would be a gender break with insects but the girls are just as interested in insects as the boys,” Maruskin said.

In addition, the librarians are excited about the bug theme. “The staff really enjoys putting together the summer reading program. As soon as one summer reading program is over they start working on the next one,” Maruskin said.

As part of the theme, Marion County Public Library is featuring Cornelius Cockroach and His Great Big Kentucky Library Adventure on its Web site. Cornelius is a cockroach made of packing material and paper that is traveling through the public libraries’ courier system to more than 20 Kentucky public libraries during the summer. Librarians are sharing his adventures and photographs at <http://www.marioncopublic.org/CorneliusTravels.html>.

Cornelius’ “parents” Roachel and Carlos are real Madagascar hissing cockroaches that live at the library. Marion County Public Library Director Amy Morgeson said the cockroaches have been a big hit. The library is averaging more than 500 summer reading program participants in house and many more in outreach programs. “We thought there would be an aversion to cockroaches but everybody’s been real excited about learning about bugs,” Morgeson said.

For more information about the summer reading program, go to KDLA’s Web site at <http://www.kdla.ky.gov/libsupport/children/SRP08.htm>.

The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives provides equitable access to quality library and information resources and services, as well as helps public agencies ensure that legislatively mandated documentation of government programs is created, efficiently maintained, and made readily accessible. For more information, visit www.kdla.ky.gov or call 502-564-8300, ext. 315.

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